

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
21 May 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Estimated Casualties in North Vietnam Resulting From the  
Rolling Thunder Program

Summary

Through April 1967 the Rolling Thunder Program against targets in North Vietnam had resulted in an estimated 52,000 casualties. This number of casualties, as a result of military action, is small when related to North Vietnam's total population of 18 million. The impact of these casualties, particularly those killed, seems even smaller when compared to the annual total of 350,000 natural deaths in North Vietnam, and an accidental death rate of which results in more deaths than are caused by the Rolling Thunder Program. Over 34,000 of the estimated casualties were civilians. Forty percent or about 21,000 of the total are estimated to have been killed.

The monthly casualty rate during the first four months of 1967 reached an average of 3,000 casualties, up sharply from the average of 2,200 during 1966. The increased casualty rate reflects the greater number of armed reconnaissance strikes being flown in the more heavily populated parts of the country, and extension of the air campaign against fixed targets situated in heavily defended urban

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areas.

The preponderance of civilian casualties is a result of the acceleration of armed reconnaissance against targets which in large measure involved civilians working on military targets or directly engaged in the maintenance and operation of the logistics system which moves supplies and personnel into Laos and South Vietnam. It is estimated that as many as 75 percent of total casualties were personnel involved in military or quasi-military activities.

Although information on actual casualties is not readily available the estimates in this memorandum are generally reliable. A detailed propaganda statement on casualties in the city of Nam Dinh is consistent with US intelligence estimates. Moreover, an inadvertent remark, [redacted] that fatalities due to the air attacks had amounted to 20,000 by late April 1967, is remarkably close to US estimates of about 21,000 fatalities.

The specific casualty claims made by the North Vietnamese government are difficult to evaluate. The Hanoi regime has never released official figures on total civilian casualties and gives actual numbers in only a few cases. These seem for the most part, to be reasonably accurate and to support the judgment that the number of casualties is kept at a low level. [redacted]

[redacted] consistently confirms the accuracy of US bombing and the conclusion that casualties are not inordinately high.

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